

MONSIEUR FOMORA

Necmi Gürsakal
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To my daughter Gözde

A CHILD'S MIND

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Editor: Kamil Bozoğlu

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MONSIEUR FOMORA

What I am about to tell you belongs to those old times when the sounds made by the clock tower to remind the city of time could be heard almost everywhere. I am speaking of the second half of the 1950s. In those days this was a quiet town where dust spread through the streets more than noise. Later the noise grew so great that no one could hear—indeed no one was able to hear—the clock tower anymore.

To speak frankly, another reason the clock tower mattered so much in those days was that not everyone owned a wristwatch. Those were the days when people walked slowly and greeted each other as if they were moving through a slow-motion film. Time itself seemed like a vast emptiness through which one had to walk slowly. I never understood how the calm I observed at the beginning of my life was later disturbed and lost.

In those days no one was in a hurry. People used to say, *“Haste leads to the grave,”* and then add, *“And there is no escaping it anyway...”* The sound of the clock tower echoing along the avenues where horse carts and carriages moved about never made anyone anxious. People would simply say to themselves, *“It’s late, I should go to bed,”* or *“It’s late, I should get up.”* Nothing more.

The sound of the clock tower, perhaps because of the wind and the rain, was not so easily heard in winter. The early evenings that followed the long, warm days of summer would soon force people to say how short the days had become. Then, as the New Year approached, everyone would repeat the cruelty of time by saying, *“Another year has passed.”*

In the summers I would fall asleep during my noon naps while thinking about strange words—*keçi hünnabı, lüp lüp tavşanı, zamkinoz, zırtaboz* and *zemberek*—most of which I did not know the meaning of, and some of which I probably invented myself just to make myself laugh. I would fall asleep to the sound of the clock tower and wake up to the sound of the clock tower. Sleepy and distant, it was as if the sound came from the time of dreams. Each chime from the clock tower stirred different stories and different colors in my mind. On summer days I would imagine that the dust floating in the sunlight flew faster and more vividly to the accompaniment of the tower’s chimes, and for some reason I believed this to be true.

Down below, around the Ahmet Pasha Cemetery, as I returned from watching the films *The Red Balloon* and *The White Mane*, I once looked up at the clock tower above and thought that the tower would be able to see the red balloon flying in the sky much better than I could. It took me much longer to understand the strange relationship between the sound of the clock tower and cemeteries.

Below the Ahmet Pasha Cemetery stood a large yellow building, enormous and very tall for those days. One of the children had said that long ago *gavurs* had worked in that building and that they had cut up a poor man and secretly buried him one night in the Ahmet Pasha Cemetery. Supposedly he had heard this from his father. These stories frightened me. When I passed near the building I would breathe in the smell of tobacco and think that when I was circumcised I might be allowed to smoke a cigarette. Depending on the season, male workers carried tobacco into the building, and women came there to prepare the tobacco bales.

One day I saw a tall man in a white linen suit and white shoes entering the yellow building through its gate. He had stepped down from a horse-drawn carriage and was going inside together with a well-dressed group of people. In this part of the city you could hardly see a foreigner—indeed, you could rarely see even well-dressed men. The blond, tall man must truly have been a foreigner. With his blond mustache curled upward at the ends and the white hat with a band around it on his head, he walked upright and confidently while the others hurried along behind him. He had to be an important man.

A friend beside me said he had seen a *gavur* before and that this man was one. Almost all the children, except me, had seen a *gavur* before. Perhaps it would have been wiser if I had not admitted that I had never seen one. I asked the friend who claimed this man was a *gavur* what his name was. As if there were nothing easier to know, he immediately said, “Fomora.”

I had not understood. “Fomora?” I asked. “Is that a *gavur* name?”

According to him, “Fomora” was indeed a *gavur* name, and supposedly he had heard from the tobacco workers that a man with that name would be coming.

I had never seen a *gavur* in my life. I did not even know whether a *gavur* was really a person like us. But I had heard somewhere that foreign men were sometimes called “Monsieur.” Trying to make a small contribution, I confirmed what my friend had said: “Yes, that’s right. The man’s name is Monsieur Fomora.”

There was a brief silence, yet none of the children objected to the name Monsieur Fomora. I think they, like me, did not want it to become obvious that they too had never really seen a *gavur*. In the end we had all seen a *gavur* together and had given the man the name **Monsieur Fomora**.

In truth, what fascinated us most was the elegant leather bag in Monsieur Fomora’s hand. The moment we saw him, we imagined ourselves walking through the school gate carrying such a

bag. In the days that followed we told the other children that we had seen Monsieur Fomora in front of the large yellow building beneath our house and across the street.

Someone suggested that the *gavurs* might have come here again to take over our country. We, who were the first to see him at the building's gate, kept talking endlessly about the man's bag and hat, exaggerating every detail. We had also seen, along with Monsieur Fomora, men in black shoes and ties entering the yellow building. We all agreed that there must be a lot of money in his bag. *Gavurs* had plenty of money, and *gavurs* were bad.

That evening, my father took me for a walk to the place in **Tophane** where the clock tower stood, from a high vantage point overlooking the red-tiled roofs of the houses in the plain. There I examined the cannon at length. During Ramadan, this cannon would fire with a loud bang at the time of the evening call to prayer, announcing to the city that it was time to break the fast. Believe it or not, there stood Monsieur Fomora, with his leather bag, examining the cannon. He touched it, put on and took off his glasses, inspecting it with meticulous care.

The next morning, I went out early and told the other children that I had seen Monsieur Fomora in Tophane. Perhaps the man was after the cannon that thunders across the city during Ramadan. Why had Monsieur Fomora come to this city? If he wished, he could do all kinds of harm—set fire to our houses while we slept. If he wished, he could take the money from his bag and buy whatever he wanted. The strange thing was that he seemed so cheerful. I suppose he could commit all these evils with a smiling face.

That entire summer, in my opinion, all the bad news was blamed on Monsieur Fomora. The porter on Setbaşı Bridge, leaning against the railings with a sack of flour on his back, had probably been pushed by Monsieur Fomora—but luckily he fell on the sack and escaped lightly. Around the same time, a plane that lost a part of its wing over a balcony not far from our house in Mapushane could also have been brought down by the foreigner, Monsieur Fomora. One of the children even suggested he might have used a secret weapon for that.

The rumor spread so widely that one of the girls we didn't include in our games grinned and said, "I know what you're talking about. There's a bad man called Monsieur Fomora wandering around here." After that day, we didn't let boys with sisters into our group either.

One day, unable to contain myself, I asked my father:

"Why do you think that *gavur* man we saw near the clock tower in Tophane came here?"

"Which *gavur* man?"

"You know—the *gavur* man in the white suit, the one with the bag."

"I don't know. Was there such a man there?"

"I mean the man standing next to the cannon, with the bag in his hand."

"Oh, him... I don't know, but maybe he came to buy the clock tower."

This was absolutely impossible. Could Monsieur Fomora, with his bag full of money, really buy the city's clock tower?

“Does he have that much money?”

“You saw his bag yourself. I didn’t pay much attention to him.”

“Would they even allow him to buy the clock tower...”

“With his money, of course. He could even put a table next to the cannon and sit there as if it were the garden of his house.”

The whole secret of the cheerful Monsieur Fomora was revealed. The next day, I told this to the other children, and they agreed with me. When the clock struck, we looked up at the tower together, sadly. One of the children said that when he grew up, he would become very rich and buy the clock tower from Monsieur Fomora. But we all knew it wouldn’t be an easy task. From that day on, I began to listen even more carefully to the sounds of the clock tower. Perhaps, when that treacherous man bought it, he would silence its chimes as well.

One day when I went to visit my uncles, I missed a very important event. Monsieur Fomora had sent the children, through one of the tobacco workers, some colorful candies that we had never seen before. All the children sat down and happily ate the sweets. From afar, the man waved to them and, smiling, disappeared into the crowd. No one even thought that the candies might be poisoned.

From that day on, the children began to say that Monsieur Fomora was a *good gavur*. Rumor had it that he once had a house in the Night Neighborhood and had come to the city to search for a treasure his father had buried. *Gavurs* usually came to the city to look for the gold they had hidden long ago. But then, why was Monsieur Fomora constantly visiting the yellow building where tobacco was processed if he had come to look for treasure? No one knew the answer to that.

Two or three days later, one of the children asked me if I had noticed anything unusual. The clock tower had stopped chiming on the hour and half-hour. That day all the children listened intently, straining their ears for its sound. And indeed, the clock tower did not chime. That evening, I asked my mother why. She shrugged it off, saying, “It’s probably broken.”

The next morning, we all listened together again. Not a single sound came from the tower. This had to be the work of Monsieur Fomora. One of the cleverer children said he had read in a book that *gavurs* could steal time, and that Monsieur Fomora had used his evil powers to do just that. Even though some of us knew this was nonsense, most of us believed it anyway.

That late afternoon, a horse-drawn carriage arrived at the yellow building’s gate. Monsieur Fomora was inside. It was finally time to teach the time-stealing *gavur* a lesson. We filled paper bags with dust and scattered ourselves near the building’s entrance. First we would distribute candy, and then Monsieur Fomora would pay the price for stealing time—right on the back of his neck—with our dust bombs.

Suddenly, a crowd appeared at the gate. That day, the crowd was bigger than any other day. A long farewell ceremony took place at the entrance. None of us dared to throw anything at the

crowd. Just as Monsieur Fomora was about to climb into the carriage, one of the men coming out of the building ran forward, holding Monsieur Fomora's bag, and shouted:

"Mr. Ihsan, you've forgotten your bag!"

The man in white laughed, took the bag, and climbed into the carriage, driving away. We all remained silent in our spots for a while. Then, shouting, "You trickster!" we began tossing dust bombs at each other.

That summer, we never spoke again about the time-stealing *gavurs*. We only beat up someone from another neighborhood who claimed the cloth in his hand was a piece of the parachute from the fallen plane. Even if we didn't know the *gavurs* well, this was clearly just a handkerchief.

That summer there were other quarrels about who had invented Monsieur Fomora. Meanwhile, the clock tower chimed again, and as it did, the dust in the sunlight flew faster and more brilliantly than ever.

It would be a long time before I realized that everyone spends their own time away.

THE FAMILY GARDEN

I remember.

The tobacco fields, the hill the city leaned on as I watched from the back window of the yellow-and-red city bus, the dusty road we walked after getting off, and the two-story wooden house surrounded by plants so thick you couldn't see inside, with a sign on the pole that said "Family Garden"—I remember all of it like it was today.

The daylight always took away all the mystery of the Family Garden, and the house looked just like a normal country house. But at night, the Family Garden suddenly changed and became a mysterious place for me. The dusty leaves under the dim red and green lights in the garden, and Müzeyyen Senar's voice whispering from somewhere inside, made the garden feel completely different at night. I think there were tables in the Family Garden, and in the evenings people ate at them.

No matter what I did, I could never see the inside of the garden properly. Every time we got off the bus at the stop, I tried to peek inside, but all I could really make out was a middle-aged woman in a long skirt, who I assumed was the owner of the Family Garden.

I can never forget Müzeyyen Senar's deep voice and the garden's colored lights. I don't even remember seeing families with children inside. For some reason, the Family Garden came alive at night, and you could hear women laughing from inside.

One night, passing by again, I heard a woman laughing out loud in the garden, but no matter how hard I tried, maybe because I was too short, I couldn't see what was happening. For a moment, I imagined there was a pool behind the boxwood bushes with red fish in it. Maybe children were sailing their little boats in that pool. "Oh, come on..." my father said.

The garden was the Family Garden, and we were a family too. So why didn't we ever come to this garden one night?

My family laughed at my suggestion, but without saying yes or no, they just ignored it. The Family Garden stayed in my mind as a question for a long time. When I grew up, I first learned from the Family Garden that there's always a big difference between what's written and what actually happens. Not every family could go to every family garden. Family gardens were not always for families.

Then time played its usual game on this garden too, which looked like it invited everyone but really only called the grown-ups. I remember very well the owner woman getting old, the house falling into disrepair, and eventually being demolished because the widened road went right through it.

The main road cut right through the middle of the Family Garden. A little lower, a new shanty neighborhood had grown under the old railway, and everyone had long forgotten this garden where Müzeyyen Senar's records used to play and the plants grew thick and green all around it.

THE PIGGY BANK CLOCK

In those old days, left as traces in memories and yellowed photographs, there was a little piggy-bank-shaped clock that no one seemed to notice much. It quietly stood on top of a pole in the city's main square. People passing by would say, "This clock is fast again" or "It's slow again," but the piggy bank clock always stared at the square and, to me, proudly carried the honor of being the city's symbol.

I don't know about anyone else, but for me, that piggy bank clock was so important that I thought it didn't just count the hours—it even counted the people walking by. It must have been full of coins. If it stood in such a central place, this piggy bank, this clock, had to be very important. On holidays, the band would play in that square. Children, soldiers, and cannons all passed by it. Even though the rumble of the street kept us from hearing the tick-tock of the big piggy-clock, it felt like its ceaseless work—or sometimes its stillness—kept time in order for the whole city.

I had seen a few people adjust their watches according to it, and that made me realize once again how important it really was.

Compared to today, there were slower people walking, women thinking they looked beautiful in coats, and children who preferred looking at the Atatürk statue right across instead of the piggy bank clock. Passing through the square at night, they never thought about the time and were drawn instead to the colorful lights in shop windows. I, however, imagined that the statue and the clock talked to each other at night—chatting about whether they were tired of standing there, whether the wind scared them, and all the little things only clocks and statues could know.

Then one day, my parents bought me a little metal piggy bank—probably because they knew how much I loved the piggy bank clock—and put it by my bed. They taught me about saving money and being careful with what we spent. We should save, they said; unnecessary consumption and showing off were bad. Buying every expensive toy had no sense. The coins in our piggy bank could be used for more important things. Life had hard days as well as good days, and we had to save money for the hard days.

I would learn much later that the coins I saved for toys could end up being used by adults for their hard days.

I never thought the bald man in front of the bank, always shaking and shouting “Money, money, money,” had a piggy bank. Maybe he didn’t even have a home. He certainly couldn’t save any money. Seeing him chased by people and shouting back always made me laugh, but it also made me think a lot about what hard days really meant.

I didn’t know where the very rich people—those with money as high as the plane trees where crows screech before rain—lived. They must have had so much money that they couldn’t care about a piggy bank clock. Their money had caught up with them and was dragging them along. Adults explained this to us: at first, you chase money; when you find it, it starts chasing you. Everyone knew that the very rich, because of diabetes or other things, could never really be happy.

The rich were unhappy. And the ones who had to save for hard days, like us, were also never fully happy, because we couldn’t always buy toys. So, who was happy?

I’d also heard that people who spun money very fast were rich, though I didn’t quite understand it. The city rulers seemed to have put a piggy bank-shaped clock in the square to teach us something, then left. And maybe that was why rich people were doomed to be unhappy.

On hot summer afternoons, cold winter days, and warm evenings when the south wind blew hard, the clock always stayed there in the square. I couldn’t understand why it wouldn’t want to go to the park on summer nights. How could such an important piggy bank clock not go to the park? With so much money, it could gather all the ice cream sellers around it!

I was sure all the city’s money was kept in that piggy bank. Strangely though, no one ever put money into it when we passed by. Everything in the square was ceremonial, so surely the city’s coins had to be ceremoniously placed in the piggy bank. I never witnessed this special ceremony, even though I believed it happened all the time.

Whenever we went there, I always saw the crazy man in front of the bank and the man selling snacks from his shiny cart, but we never saw anyone put coins into the clock. Maybe the coin-placing ceremony was secret. Very secret. The kind of secret they tell children not to ask about. Perhaps the city leaders gathered at midnight and did it. Soldiers and police would surround the square, and coins would go into the clock unseen. If there was such a ceremony, it had to be quiet and hidden.

One day, the only thing I ever saw was two workers climbing the piggy bank clock with a ladder and a bucket of water. I stopped and watched, ignoring the adults beside me. Maybe they were going to take money out of the clock, or maybe put some in...

Surprisingly, no police or soldier stopped them. In the end, they neither took money nor put money in. They only cleaned the glass and climbed down. I was sad but never gave up; maybe that's how the clock fooled people.

My little metal piggy bank at home, though not as magical as the piggy bank clock, was still very important. Buying all the toys of the future depended on it being full. If the clock shook, everyone could hear the coins inside. The city's grown-ups must have used the clock to collect money from those in need. Maybe they would open it when the city itself was in trouble.

Later, I imagined that the city's collected coins—because there had to be collected coins—were put in the piggy bank after everyone went to bed. Maybe people came at night with bags of coins and a ladder, secretly putting them in. The coins would also be taken out late at night, I thought.

Once, passing by late at night, I kept looking back at the clock and my parents scolded me. "You've lost your mind over that clock," they said.

Surely, the ones most curious about how much money was in the piggy bank clock were thieves. But maybe even they didn't dare to steal from such a big, exposed piggy bank. I imagined all their plans failing because of the difficulty of taking coins from the city's center. On nights like these, I hid my metal piggy bank under my pillow, keeping my coins safe for the toys waiting in the fat man's shop window.

The piggy bank clock, placed for a bank advertisement, told me long stories about time and money every time I passed. One story, in particular, made me stop in the middle of the road and listen closely.

"Stop, you've listened too much, but let me tell you the story of the man who wastes time," it would say. And it would begin. I promised never to tell anyone, and maybe that pleased it.

Its favorite listeners were the sleepy night guards in brown coats, who came out late in the evening. The piggy bank clock recognized every night guard, knew their troubles, and never forgot to make little sounds to entertain a guard praying and blowing his whistle all night for his sick daughter.

It also told me about a watchmaker working with a ladder, searching for the best wood to make a clock. For years, it had dreamed the same dream: that even atop the pole in the middle of the city, it could sleep. What if the city's coins were stolen?

The piggy bank clock didn't worry. It believed it was doing its best to show the city the correct time and that it deserved a peaceful sleep at night.

The story of the man who wastes time went like this:

"There are many men wasting time in this city, but one of them is unmatched. He inherited a huge fortune from his father, and he had the strangest job you could imagine. Tall, always wearing glasses, determined, he worked with forty-one clerks. Each clerk carried a bag with

notebooks, pens, erasers, and sharpeners. They had lifetime job security and looked down on everyone just a little. I remember one clerk teasing me: ‘Trick track, trick track, never working—how silly!’”

Even those who laughed at the piggy bank clock were mocking people protecting the city’s coins. Forty-one clerks, black sleeves to keep shirts clean... To me, the rich man controlling these clerks became the fat toy seller. The richest man in the world, with his roly-poly clerks—probably his tumbling dolls in the shop window.

“Trick track, trick track, never working...”

Lifetime-job guaranteed tumbling clerks...

Even when the rich man ran low on money, he gave fake coins to the clerks to survive.

The piggy bank clock loved telling all these stories about the city. Sometimes, it told things so complicated even I couldn’t understand. Maybe it was also a way to stop me from asking, “When do they put the coins in?”

As I grew, I listened less, and my mother noticed first. I had other dreams: cinema, football, new toys. The fat toy seller had died, his shop closed. Adults said, “This clock is broken now, it always shows the wrong time.” A friend once said, “You’re so naive, thinking the city’s money is in that piggy bank.” And indeed, it wasn’t. Worse, no coins for hard days were anywhere.

That night, I couldn’t sleep. I threw my metal piggy bank out the window, ignoring the few coins inside. A few days later, it would be in the basement. I didn’t know how I knew, but money would always be a problem for us.

While listening to the distant whistles of night guards, staring at the moon, I began to cry. I didn’t know that after midnight, they would remove the piggy bank clock and put another strange clock in its place...

GLOBAL AFFAIRS...

The City That Lost Its Memory in the Inns

The Bazaar Book

The Tragic End of the Silk Machine

Bernstein's Stations

THE CITY THAT LOST ITS MEMORY IN THE INNS

Don't believe me, not for a second. I have this habit of telling stories. Whenever I speak the truth, no one listens—but when I start a tale, everyone perks up. Knowing this, I write stories on sheets of paper where my words vanish as soon as they are written, and I wake at night to scribble tales for this city, a city that seems to demand stories.

You may have heard from others, but listen to me. Let me tell you how, long before we lost our minds, this city lost its memory in its inns.

Once upon a time, in the distant past, there was a city in some faraway land that lost its memory in its inns. Now don't scoff, saying, "Can a city really lose its memory in inns?"—it's a tale, and in tales, anything is possible.

On a dazzling summer day, when camels were town criers and fleas were barbers, a huge fire broke out in a city of inns, plane trees, greenery, mountains, and plains—so close it almost reached the firehouse. The joyous people of summer saw the sky turn black with smoke. The ground shook in an instant. Some compared the fire to a magical dragon, others claimed they had seen it in dreams days before.

Stacks of fabrics, chests filled with gold, colorful patterned cloths, handwoven carpets, lace, bundles of silk and satin—all either burned to ashes or became wretched in hours. Faces in panic, bridal gowns aflame, melting gold, and plane trees turned to coal—the fire took everything. Every hope, every place, every person was transformed in shape, location, gaze, and posture by that blaze.

The old inns, strong enough to have survived earthquakes and past fires, were astonished. They groaned in the chaos, remembering the unbearable weight of age and all they had endured.

Some say the inns even made peace with the coal-blackened plane trees that night. You may not believe me, but that's what happened. And yet, compared to the unimaginable effects the fire had on the city's economy in a single night, that is a minor detail.

Then, the flames died down, the smoke cleared, and a profound silence settled over the city. The children of the city that had lost its memory in its inns now saw in the heart of the city a fire-ravaged place, composed of soot-covered stones, rubble, collapsed walls, and charred plane trees.

Strangely, no one sang songs about "the heart of the city burned, so many lives lost." No one seemed to notice. When an old man washed his face in the fountain in front of the firehouse, telling how the city lost its memory in a single night, people looked at him as if he were pitiful.

If I told you that this very old man told a blind man, who had just saved his money from the fire, “You saved your coins, but this city lost its memory in these inns,” you might still say I’m making it up. Some among you might even ask, “Was the city’s memory really in the inns?”

The truth is, a city that forgets the beginning of an empire—if it loses its memory in its inns—would that be so strange? At least, let us accept that the city’s memory had something to do with the inns. Perhaps, more accurately, the city didn’t lose its memory in a single fire. Maybe this story of losing memory began long before. Perhaps the fire merely swept through, burned the walls, and destroyed the last remaining economic symbols, drawing a final line under the event.

A bespectacled economic historian, who loudly insisted that a city’s true memory lay in its economy, said after the fire, “To understand Renaissance finance, you had to understand these inns—and we flattened them with this fire,” standing before the ruined doorway of a collapsed inn.

According to legend, the inns held secret records showing that they once worked as a spice depot for Europe. The records were hidden in a tiny chest in a wall niche of a completely ordinary room in the inn at the very center. Later, the ashes of these records allegedly ended up in the hands of a man who stumbled while passing through the fire site.

If you look at me like, “Are you really telling the truth about Russians selling furs outside the inns?”—then let me tell you: during World War II, a German came to investigate that very room. But, of course, you probably won’t believe me.

I fear you don’t even know about the two kings—one lame, one hunchback—who came on impossibly long caravans from faraway lands on the same day in the 17th century, arguing over fabrics in the city...

Both liked the same golden cloth in Koza Han, and their men fought fiercely. Even when the kings became distracted by a dancing toy machine from Hungary, they returned to incite their men: “This cloth is mine, I will never give it up!”

After all this, a blind little child told me one evening how the water flowing through the city’s wooden houses wept, unable to hold back tears. I could not imagine water crying. According to the child, when a city loses its memory in its inns, the water flowing through it cries.

Time passed. One day, I met that old man again in an old café. It had once been a consulate. He seemed to speak casually, “This is next to the hospital that cares for sick storks.”¹ He pulled a yellowed piece of paper from his old coat pocket, showing notes written in old script—notes he had saved from the fire in the inns.

¹ I suppose I need to clarify that this is not a fictional story.

I don't know why, but I thought he might be the city's "Mizan-ı Harir Emini,"² the very man who started the rumor that the city lost its memory in its inns. Slowly, he said to me, "When a city loses its memory, the water flowing through it cries." Immediately, I remembered the blind child. I asked him about the secret records of the inns working as a spice depot for Europe and the small chest in the central inn's wall. Was it true a German came to investigate during World War II?

The old man let his eyes wander across the ceiling of the café, then silently placed the yellowed paper on the table, grabbed a small child standing nearby by the hand, and hurried away. I ran after them, but in the narrow streets along the brown-colored stream, I could never catch up. I didn't notice a man building a makeshift hut by the stinking stream, busy boiling herbs, too flustered to care.

Don't believe me, not for a second. I have this habit of telling stories. Whenever I speak the truth, no one listens—but when I begin a tale, everyone stops to listen. Knowing this, I write stories on sheets of paper where my words vanish, waking at night to tell tales for this city, a city made for stories.

You may ask, "If your words vanish from the paper, what are these?" Fair question. Let me reveal the secret: remember the yellowed paper the old man gave me in the café, saved from the inns?

And please, don't ask if this yellowed paper can solve the problem called globalization. If you do, I will leave the tale behind and start speaking facts—and then the magic is gone. Besides, I have work to do: I am sipping tea at the café next to the stork hospital.

² The government official in charge of taxes related to silk.

THE BAZAAR BOOK

In memory of Yücel Balku

Here before you is Chongzhen, the last emperor of the Chinese Ming Dynasty. He is seated on his throne, clad in deep blue silk adorned with bird motifs, like a porcelain plate brought to life. The calendar marks the year 1628. The first words he speaks to his entourage are something along the lines of: “Dealing with rebels won’t be easy. Farmers across the country are at their breaking point.”

During the empire’s smoother days, advisors—known for their wisdom in handling crises—would have strengthened their positions by responding prudently. Yet when they merely lowered their gazes to the floor, the emperor lifted his eyes to the ceiling, though even this did little to hide the anxious worry in them. The empire now teetered on the brink of a catastrophe unlike any before.

The throne sat at the center of a grand hall, decorated in shades of yellow and red. Outside, black clouds loomed over the sky visible through the tall windows to the right, further discouraging the already troubled emperor. Ask anyone the causes, and each would have an answer: justice unresolved, palace intrigues. Yet no one, not even the emperor himself, wanted to dwell on the possible outcomes. Even on the day of his coronation, despair was widespread. Had someone told anyone then that when Chong Zhen turned thirty-five he would end his life atop a coal heap in Beijing, no one in the Forbidden City would have been surprised.

The final event leading the emperor toward such a fate came in the spring of 1644, when news arrived that Li Zicheng’s rebellious army had entered Beijing. To avoid humiliation at the hands of the rebels, the emperor invited his family to commit harakiri with him, soon realizing he could no longer control anyone. Thus, while his beloved city and its people—the markets, the textiles, the handicrafts—burned and fell, he climbed the familiar hill alone and ended his life, leaving behind a note.

The note read: “Enemy! Do as you wish with me, but spare my people!”

A Chinese historian, notorious for exaggerating events, claimed that Chong Zhen wrote this note atop a page of a richly illustrated book depicting China's bazaars, though no other historian has ever confirmed this. What truly happened, as recounted here, requires returning to the day the emperor ascended the throne:

Shortly after his coronation, one of the advisors who knew his childhood well approached him with a suggestion to lift the gloom from the hall. The elderly advisor said, "I respectfully propose preparing a grand manuscript on China's bazaars and distributing copies via envoys across the country and the world."

Chong Zhen clung to this idea as if it were a lifeline. From that moment on, it became the day's most pressing matter. As orders were issued, a team of the empire's finest miniaturists and calligraphers presented themselves to the emperor.

Miniaturists immediately set out to visit bazaars and sketch what they saw, while calligraphers documented each shop and artisan with their ink and pen. For two full years, the team labored tirelessly on the manuscript. Pages adorned with gold-leafed dragons, showcasing the empire's splendor, were then entrusted to the kingdom's most skilled bookbinders. Once the first copy was presented to the emperor, the palace workshops worked like a hive to replicate the manuscript quickly. Yet Chong Zhen, preoccupied with pacifying the approaching angry peasants, barely glanced at the manuscript.

A few days later, Chong Zhen met with a Persian envoy and a silk merchant from Tabriz in the grand audience hall to discuss trade. When the envoy explained that the merchant, Muzaffer, was a leading trader in Persia, the emperor asked him:

"What other goods do you trade besides silk?"

With deep respect, Muzaffer replied:

"Several years ago, I bought rubies and pearls from a moneychanger named Muslihüddin in Bursa, on a six-month credit, and sold them in Tabriz. It was very profitable. Now I hope to carry silk, pearls, and spices from China's bazaars to both Tabriz and Bursa."

At this, the emperor remembered the Bazaar Book and ordered his servant to present the envoy and merchant with two small mother-of-pearl music boxes along with copies of the manuscript. Upon receiving the books, both visitors could not conceal their admiration.

The Persian envoy, hands folded over his stomach and eyes lowered, asked: "Forgive me, mighty Emperor, if I overstep, but how did the idea of commissioning a book on bazaars come to your mind? It's an extraordinarily interesting concept, isn't it?"

Chong Zhen, known in Chinese history for his love of pleasure and indulgence, as well as for his corpulent and irritable demeanor, leaned closer to share a secret few knew: his fondness for bazaars and particularly toys.

Momentarily shedding the worry etched in his face, the emperor answered: "Bazaars are our childhood. They are the land of sweets, cookies, and toys. My own childhood

passed in the Forbidden City; I never stepped outside its gates. But my teachers told me much about the world beyond, especially about the bazaars, and I absorbed it all. Perhaps you won't believe me, but the one thing that makes me truly happy is walking through bazaars. Since my coronation, I make it a point to visit the shops and distribute sweets and toys to children."

After this delightful conversation, the visitors thanked him repeatedly and departed with permission, carrying their copies of the book.

Muzaffer spent his days at the house where he was hosted, poring over the Bazaar Book. His limited knowledge of Chinese meant he could not understand the text, yet he became utterly absorbed in the gold-leafed dragons and illustrations of the markets, losing all sense of time.

When it was time to leave China, Muzaffer first bid farewell to the envoy and then prepared to join the caravan bound for Tabriz, placing the Bazaar Book in the safest compartment. Along the route, which would later be known as the Silk Road, Muzaffer never forgot the childlike face of the emperor who had called bazaars "our childhood."

Within the first week, however, a bandit attack separated Muzaffer from the book. The manuscript, along with Muzaffer's bales of silk, pearls, rubies, and spice-laden chests, fell into the hands of the robbers, bound for lands far beyond Tabriz.

One of the bandits, hair and beard streaked with gray and intimidating to all who saw him, had no trouble convincing a young Rıza Halid to buy the book. Rıza Halid was the son of a wealthy merchant in Üsküp who traded silk, jewels, and spices near the Çifte Hamam bazaar. The bandit, residing in Suli Han, sold the Bazaar Book to him for an incredible sum.

Although Rıza Halid had long dreamed of China, he had never joined a caravan there, caught up in inheritance, marriage, and children. But with the purchase of this Chinese manuscript from the wandering—though more robber than traveler—he rekindled his passion and dreams, rejoicing.

His wife asked where he had found the book and what it contained. He replied: "I acquired it from a dark-faced traveler staying at Suli Han. It depicts the bazaars of China." He warned her that no one else must touch the book. Behiye, his wife, could not fathom how such an ornate book could concern bazaars, suspecting the strange markings were either state secrets or magical recipes.

Rıza Halid's greatest joy was poring over the pages whenever he had free time. Neighbors knew of his devotion; they said, "He loves that book; he caresses its pages as if alive." When a fire broke out in the house next door, Rıza Halid's family even knew he tried to rescue the book before the gold. The manuscript came to be called "Rıza's Book."

After Rıza Halid died at seventy-three, the Bazaar Book passed down through generations, eventually landing among the belongings of a family leaving the Balkans for Bursa in the 1800s. They placed it in a chest in the upper floor of a wooden house near Şahadet Mosque in Tophane, Bursa, and left it there forgotten.

Years passed; the empire fell, the republic was declared, and even multiparty politics emerged. By the 1950s, Hafız Bedri, the eldest of the family, now in his sixties, would tell anyone he met: “We migrated here from the capital of Macedonia. Our lineage traces back to Rıza Halid of Üsküp. Did you know? Yahya Kemal is also from Üsküp. Üsküp resembles Bursa. Bazaars and baths, all the same.”

Hafız Bedri, owner of a shop in the Coppersmiths’ Bazaar, recounted how his family moved from Üsküp to Bursa, sharing stories of his great-great-grandfather who had longed to travel to China but never could, and thus how the family eventually settled in the old capital. He would also narrate how he met his wife Behiye, hearing her sing a melancholy folk song and deciding to marry her immediately.

Everyone knew how deeply Hafız Bedri loved Behiye. The only point of contention in their marriage was the Bazaar Book kept in the chest upstairs. Early in their marriage, the fiery depictions of dragons in the Chinese manuscript frightened Behiye, and she begged her husband to give it away or sell it.

Hafız Bedri’s love for the book outweighed his wife’s fear, and he discreetly circumvented her request. However, Behiye remained firm, a stance reinforced by a fire near their home in spring 1958. She believed the fire was linked to the dragons in the “Çin Çon kitabı,” nagging her husband ceaselessly.

By summer, Hafız Bedri could no longer resist. One Saturday morning, he climbed to the upper floor, opened the rusty chest, and gazed upon the painstakingly embroidered white cloth wrapping the book. Though yellowed and stained, it had remained the book’s oldest companion for over three centuries. Despite careful handling, the manuscript was now fragile.

Hafız Bedri secretly took the book to a trusted binder in the Covered Bazaar, instructing: “This book has seen much, traveled many roads. Take your time. I will wait. Even a year, I will wait.”

That night, a troubling dream disturbed his sleep: he saw the binder placing the Bazaar Book on a shelf while giving him a strange look. Waking only to observe the chaos outside and hearing shouts of “Fire in the Covered Bazaar!” he rushed down to join the crowd gathered near Balibey Han.

Seeing the shops near the binder’s burned in flames, he thought only of rescuing the book. Despite his aging legs, he ran alongside neighbors toward the inferno consuming the bazaar. Exhausted and covered in soot, Hafız Bedri was eventually rescued by fellow shopkeepers, muttering, “Ah Behiye, ah, how the fate of the Bazaar Book has intertwined with the bazaar fire.”

News quickly spread that the fire had started in the binder’s shop and then engulfed others, reaching all of Bursa within days. Later, when Behiye asked, “What happened to that book?” Hafız Bedri paid no heed.

One of Behiye's grandchildren, who grew up hearing the story as a tale, still remembers the fate of the Bazaar Book, with its golden, flame-breathing dragons, intertwined with the fire that ravaged the bazaar.

THE TRAGIC END OF THE SILK MACHINE

*"Progress comes from the advancement of people.
It does not come from the advancement of machines."*

— Adrian Tchaikovsky, *Blood of the Mantis*

Ahmet Rıza Efendi

Even if you don't believe it, Semiha, it's a fact that I've always been afraid of seeing someone else's face in the mirror instead of my own. Now don't start telling me again what Leman, Dürrizade's daughter from Istanbul, has said. You already know why Leman, who has been the best customer of the Mudanya railway for two years and wanders between Istanbul and Paris, never liked me. She inherited a small fortune from her father. Digging into old records is of no use to either of us now.

Half an hour before dawn in Yeniköy, did two women swimming in the sea feel that the water was warm? Did a woman drawing water from the well in Makri village notice the cold water felt warm? And in Katırlı village, did a column of steam rise from the sea, stretching miles toward the southeast... Of course, Leman is your dear friend and confidante—whatever she says must be true...

It was decided to acquire two seismographs for Istanbul: one for the observatory, the other for the Yıldız Palace garden. Don't ask what a seismograph is, Semiha—they measure the movements of the earth. Leman didn't tell you that too...

If Leman says it, it's true; if Istanbul says it, it's true, Semiha. I alone have never been right, and I bear that pain.

After your father died, we moved from our house in Hisar to your home in Nalbandoğlu at your request. You would take care of your mother, and I would be closer to my work at the Vilayet. I am aware of your relatives provoking you, saying things like, "Your husband has gone mad," Semiha. After my relatives, my aunt, her daughters, my uncles, and everyone else said their piece, your family speaks freely, my dear.

I've never had much luck. Look at the sugar and confections made by Hüsnü Bey, their elegance and delicacy, superior to anything made anywhere else. Foreigners visiting Bursa and all the local officials and people admired them... In 1894, the Hüdavendigar Vilayet sent a report

recommending he be awarded an industrial medal to encourage local industrialists. Seniha, distributing syrups and jams to officials and getting a medal for it—what an age! If I wrote this to our Sultan, Abdulhamid II, what would he think? He's busy looking for remedies for the violent movements of the earth, and now he'd have to deal with my reports as well...

Time passes regardless of what we do, Semiha. Look, I've already turned forty. Whatever anyone says, I have my dreams. I am not the one who asked the Jewish physician Avram, "What do you call someone afraid of seeing another's face in the mirror?" If only your mother had asked him why we don't have children...

That machine, whatever you say, Semiha, will work somewhere. Your mother, lying in bed, will gossip to neighbors: "Our son-in-law is a bit odd, playing with gears in the back annex"; Leman's mother will say, "He never grew up, that son-in-law of yours." Yet, that machine will work somewhere. The earth has ears, Semiha, and to those who say, "He spent our daughter's gold bracelet on that strange machine," may God be good to them—I have nothing else to say.

Of course, one wants recognition for entrepreneurial efforts. Last year, merchant Nikolaki Efendi from Balık Pazarı was awarded a rank for distributing firewood and coal for free to the people. I wrote the permit from the Vilayet, dated October 8, 1893. That same year, a request for an Industrial Medal was made for your relative Abdurrahman Ağa, whose father was involved in cartridge production, in recognition of the displays he organized for the Sultan's birthday and enthronement. A report was sent from Hüdavendigâr Vilayet on November 27, 1894.

Everyone interfered in our affairs: your mother, Leman, and you always remained silent. Armenians are rising in the East, the earth is shaking beneath our feet, and you treat me like a madman with my inventions, Semiha.

Semiha

Are you an inventor, Ahmet Rıza? Did I marry you to tinker with inventions? What more do you need than the Vilayet clerical position? Why would Leman be jealous of you? It never ends, Ahmet Rıza. You endlessly complain and insult my poor mother. We're entering the holy months; I ask you to be quiet, yet you never are.

Yes, we didn't only go to Avram Garti. My mother and I also visited Nalbandoğlu Mosque nearby and spoke to Seyide, the imam's wife, our distant relative. We were concerned about a relative afraid of seeing another's face in the mirror. We didn't even give your name. My mother suspects it could involve someone wishing you well, Ahmet Rıza.

Years ago, the house was bought from a Frenchman. He told my mother that there had once been a small bath where the annex now stands. Seeing you spend hours in the annex building your machine, the poor woman thought you might have disturbed the spirits of the old bath. Seyide was astonished too, saying, "What's that? I swear I've turned a year older, what a strange relative you have..."

Ah, Ahmet Rıza! You are poisoning our sweet life for nothing. Suppose you built this machine yourself to wrap, twist, and fold silk. You aren't even formally educated, yet you drew machines on paper endlessly. You fear the mirror but not your work. You've driven my mother and me mad. We spent so much money to have a photograph taken of this machine. Why did Harir Darüttalimi never say a word about it? Isn't this their business? May our Sultan appoint you chief inventor and save us all from this misery, Ahmet Rıza.

You're so naive, Ahmet Rıza, you went crazy with joy at hearing this. Suppose the Ministry of Trade and Public Works orders the machine's use and replication and the Vilayet forwards it to the Bursa Chamber of Commerce and Industry. What comes of it, Ahmet Rıza? You were about to celebrate. Months go by—who knocks on your door? Who uses the machine? Who paid you? The machine lies in the annex like a heap of scrap. Why bother inventing?

Witness your death, Ahmet Rıza. If I lie, may my mother die. The man from the French Consulate didn't come for your invention; my mother swore he came to ask the name of the Frenchman who previously owned the house.

Leman

Semiha saw in me the love story of Talat and Fitnat. She said, "Let me read," but I doubt she actually did. When I was in Paris, she always wrote to me telling how much she admired me. She could never accept that Ahmet Rıza had worked for my father. My late father actually liked Ahmet Rıza very much, saying, "This boy is very skilled, he fixes everything." Hearing that I looked at Ahmet Rıza differently, my father hastily sent me to Istanbul, then Paris. He immediately had me removed from Ahmet Rıza's service, and the poor man began working as a Vilayet clerk. Later, someone intervened and Ahmet Rıza married Semiha. I had just returned to Istanbul when I heard this. Before my father passed away, nothing my mother did could send me back to Bursa. I still haven't forgiven her. She knows it, so...

Those who haven't seen Paris cannot understand love. Once, I said "Seine River" to Semiha, and she asked, "Is there really a river in Paris?" Semiha is an ordinary but good girl; she never goes against her mother. If her mother doesn't want the machine to stay in the annex, then it can't stay there.

The Bursa Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture, and Industry examined the matter and gave Ahmet Rıza's cousin the report; I read it too:

"Today, in Bursa, wrapping, twisting, and folding 3 kıyye of silk in one day requires the work and effort of 50 laborers. With this machine, the same task can be done in one day by a single worker under the supervision of a woman operating the machine."

The machine reduces the work of 50 people to two. I cannot understand how someone who grew up in Hisar and had limited education could make such a machine. Their family hadn't even done silk farming. Some say he made wire carts as a child, or repaired broken coffee grinders in the neighborhood. But is that experience enough?

When my cousin read me the report, I imagined Ahmet Rıza like the inventors whose photos appear in France's famous newspapers. I realized how right I was to love him. Yet he never noticed me. I wish he had devoted even a fraction of the effort for this machine to me. Ahmet Rıza has always been like this, even when working for my father. He wanders as if in another world. He had a certain strangeness. Semiha and her mother will drive him to his death. I cannot stand the mother and daughter treating Ahmet Rıza like a madman.

Ahmet Rıza Efendi

Today what I feared has come true. Looking in the mirror, I saw another's face. I never told Semiha. When she sent me off to work, she said, "Why is your face so pale again? I hope all is well," and let me go. At the corner, I turned back and saw the street door still ajar, a piece of Semiha's white head covering visible.

I spoke very little all day at the Vilayet. The deputy governor scolded me for mistakes in my reports, then asked, "What about your machine?" and added, "Life does not work with just a machine." He was right; life doesn't work with just a machine. All those years of toil brought me only a medal... and they wouldn't have given it if I hadn't wanted it.

I wouldn't care if I hadn't learned the machine's importance in Europe. People put machines to work for everything; we tried too, but apparently it didn't work. Semiha isn't happy. My mother-in-law isn't happy until the machine leaves the annex. A Jewish man who said he'd buy the machine a few months ago never followed up. All this increases my stress and fears. After all, silk production can't happen without boiling the worms. Maybe they're right. Or perhaps it's because I worked so hard in the annex, not because I meddled with the "good omens"...

Leman is completely right. The machine cannot stay there without my mother-in-law's consent. Maybe then I'll see my own face in the mirror again and start to heal.

This weekend, Semiha and her mother are going to a wedding in Gürsu. If I can find a cart, I'll wrap the machine in sacks and quietly remove it from Nalbandoğlu under the cover of darkness, either swinging it down from Cilimboz or Abdal Bridge...

Of course, I'll feel sad—won't I?—all that effort going to waste.

Its birth was difficult, but its death will probably be easy. I'll ask my cousin Nahit for a cart...

BERNSTEIN'S STATIONS

My name is Bernstein, Joseph Bernstein. I've just retired. My wife, Anita, thinks I must be out of my mind to embark on such a trip in the middle of winter. I've been in this city for three days. Since I arrived, snow has piled up on the roofs, across the plains, and on the roads. This is an old city set at the foot of a mountain, noisy with horns. "The mountain can't be seen up close," my mother used to say. As I approached the city, I couldn't tell from the hotel where exactly the mountain was.

Through the window, I see small shops, mosques, and minarets. In another part of the city, I see old wooden houses. In front of the hotel, a little boy is selling handkerchiefs, ignoring the cold. Late at night, with the streets iced over, car and human sounds diminish, and the city quickly drifts to sleep.

Everything here is exactly as I imagined—neither lacking nor excessive. Neither fully modern nor entirely old. It's a place where you can see everything at once. Houses, cars, people, all close together and intertwined. Seeing this closeness, I think these people cannot possibly suffer from loneliness. Forget loneliness—one might even get tired of living so closely together.

In a frozen city at the foot of a great mountain, I spent three long, half-awake days. It was strange, as if I had known this city for a long time. I felt as if I had already seen this hotel and heard the sounds of the streets and the shouts of the children. With a notebook filled with yellowed handwritten pages in my hand, I spent the days staring at the city through the hotel window. On one page—the page I liked best—there was a pencil sketch of a toy bear next to the sum of some numbers. What a pointless effort; how could anyone see fifty-four years into the past just by standing in front of a window...

For three days, I've been asking myself why I never came to this city before retiring. There are so many questions to ask... Before retiring, I never imagined my questions would form such a mountain, and I had chosen not to look closely at them. Retirement, perhaps, reminded me that I had too little time left to act. How strange—it was as if I set out thinking, "Now is the time to dig into the past." Perhaps I should have never come here, neither in my youth nor now. Why... Because there is never a truly appropriate time to dig into the past.

I only managed to step outside the hotel once to get a cigarette. That outing was mostly because of a young man trying to tell me about the girl he liked in his broken German. I grew

tired of listening to this man in the lobby, with a scar on his cheek. To escape him, I used the cigarette as an excuse to leave.

This city really does resemble the city of my father's memories. My first impression is that the people here do not concern themselves much with the fact that there's a big world outside. At the moment, they view almost everything through the lens of the snow—how much snow will fall, when will it stop...

The snow has reached my knees. Now I watch cars sliding and people shouting from my lazy hotel room window. Only in this way can a person truly know a city they've never seen. I am surprised at how many details I know about it.

From my father's memories, I even know about the sesame-coated bagels baked in a molasses-like syrup at a bakery here. Everything in this city brings back my father's memories. On the snowy roads, I imagine camel caravans heading to a nearby inn. Before my eyes pass the lines my father wrote about the inns.

This trip has been planned for a very long time. My wife not coming along was truly fortunate. I could never have embarked on this journey with someone who kept telling me, endlessly, that it was just an obsession of mine. Yet I never said a word when my wife bought a supposed antique astrolabe in Spain that turned out to be fake. I could even have lied, telling her that I came to this city to search for the German orphanage I had once seen in a photo—but I didn't. I chose, as always, to be honest with her.

It was a mere coincidence that my parents first met in this old Ottoman city at a small station. There can be no connection between that coincidence and my years of working as a train engineer. But these are not things to mock. I also want to forget Anita's constant teasing, "The foundations of your family were laid in Turkey, that's why you want to go there so much." Snow covers everything beautifully.

You know, when a person gets close to something they've longed for, they often feel fear. After traveling such a long way in winter from Germany, I must admit I was a little afraid. I am now very close to the three stations I've wanted to see for years. These are my stations—I hope they haven't been destroyed. And yet, here I am, close to them, lounging in a hotel room with a cigarette. Snow, I think, is partly an excuse. My mind is in chaos.

When I asked the boy at reception about the train stations, he gave me a strange look and said, "There are no trains in this city. Perhaps you mean the rail system used for city transportation?" But I was looking for the old train stations. One of them was called "Central," the second—later I learned from a dictionary—"Merinos," a type of sheep bred in Australia, and the third, I cannot recall its name now. The boy simply and clearly told me that there were no trains or train stations here. Naturally, he had no idea about the three stations I had dreamed of for years, or their significance in my life, because they simply didn't exist.

I probably should have spoken with someone older. If Anita saw my situation, she would have laughed and said, “How can you Turks not know Joseph’s stations...? The man never worked until he retired, he just dreamed about these stations. I told him a hundred times to go and see them, and he didn’t.”

No matter what anyone says, these are my stations.

I cannot expect Anita to understand how important these places are to me. No matter how much she teases me, I still love her deeply.

The snow continues to fall. I should smoke one more cigarette and then sleep.

*** *** ***

In the morning, the sky cleared a little, and the snow stopped. I enjoyed a breakfast with bagels. With the help of the hotel staff, I found the municipal building. There, a dark-haired young woman, saying she would never forgive her father for leaving them for a German woman, suggested a foundation that researches the city. She could take me straight to their office if I wished. Only they could know whether the old stations had been destroyed. She herself had no memory of these stations. Her father had died last year in a car accident with that terrible German woman. In her view, evildoers always got their due.

With the guide she provided, I walked a bit and arrived at a coffeehouse called Mahfel, which had a print showing the bridge as it looked in the 1800s. I remembered this from my father’s writings. Before World War II, my father, who had fled Germany, spoke in his memoirs about several conversations he had in Mahfel with Turkish officers. The guide, sipping tea, explained in broken German that the Foundation’s office was under the library across the street, and someone would come soon.

Shortly after, a man named Raif, with thinning hair, arrived from the Foundation. He knew the city’s history and its old stations very well. Central Station had been demolished and no trace remained. Merinos Station stood beside a public institution but was in poor condition. The third station, within the boundaries of a large estate, was intact. We could go there immediately if I wished.

About twenty minutes later, we reached the small station. The third station was smaller than I imagined, more like a shed than a station. The door was closed, so we could not enter. Mr. Raif kept asking if I conducted historical research and mentioned a journal they published. I walked a few rounds around the building and told him I had retired as a train engineer. He gave me a look as if he didn’t understand. I suspect he also wondered if I was a treasure hunter. He mentioned that Greeks who left the city during the War of Independence returned years later to search for treasure in some houses. I would have liked to come for such a mundane reason—it would not have hurt me at all.

I had to explain how I had long wanted to see Central Station, how I knew Merinos Station from my father's memoirs, and how the station before us now was far more significant to me... I took a couple of photos of the small building, thanked him, and returned to the hotel.

My father and my Polish mother first met in this distant land and fell in love. They both worked for a time at the Imperial Factory, and my mother became pregnant with me in this city. When the war ended, my mother persistently suggested returning to Europe. My father wrote in his memoirs that he had failed to respond sensitively enough to her wishes.

One day, my mother packed her bags and headed to Central Station. My father ran after her, but in vain. At Central Station, he realized she had no intention of returning. They argued slowly on the train to Mudanya, arriving together at the third station. Realizing he could not persuade her, my father got off the train at the third station. My mother, carrying me in her womb, first went to Mudanya, then returned to Germany via Istanbul.

The separation occurred at the third station. This small, forgotten place, isolated from the crowds, resembles more a farm shed than a station. Who would think such a tiny, insignificant place could mark the end of two people's relationship?

I lost my mother last year. You can easily understand how much I loved her. I know my father only from photos and the memoirs in the little notebook sent to us after his death. I never met him.

In the past, I tried discussing the station with my mother a few times. At first, she pretended not to hear, then said something like, "Life is the sum of your mistakes anyway." The only thing I wanted to know was who was to blame.

A year after my mother returned to Europe, my father also left Turkey and emigrated to America. He never called us once. I know him only through the memoirs and photographs sent after his death. Life was the sum of mistakes—but whose mistake weighed heaviest? My mother, who viewed life as a sum of mistakes, never addressed this question and often preferred to watch TV.

Two days later, I left the city. At the hotel, the young man attempting to tell me about the girl he liked was drinking. I was probably not pleased to see the city my father lived in for many years, nor the old small stations. All my life, I had wondered whether the blame lay with my father or my mother, and why these two people, who I believed truly loved each other until death, chose unhappiness over a petty stubbornness.

That "petty stubbornness" explanation was entirely my own invention. I had always deceived myself that way in my youth. Stubborn people never give up, even if it makes no sense. My mother was very stubborn. My theory of "petty stubbornness" largely relied on her obstinacy. She never liked Anita either. From what I could tell from memories, my father was probably not so stubborn. So, was the greater blame on my mother...? The city I saw and the third station offered no new answers to my questions.

I followed my mother's path. On the train back from Mudanya to Istanbul, a newspaper in front of the man sitting next to me caught my eye—it was the young man from the hotel, still explaining about the girl he loved. The scar on his face was more visible in the first photo. In the second photo, a young girl lay on the snow between the trees near the old small station. For some reason, the third station was always the point of separation. The final moment always occurred at the third station.

Upon returning, I could not tell Anita what had happened. Coincidentally or not, on the day I saw the third station, I did not know she had left a short letter and left the house. Anita now says she will spend the rest of her life with someone else and will never return to me. In an instant, everything in my life changed. I feel like that scarred young man, drinking heavily. If I wrote a letter to Mr. Raif asking them to demolish the third station, would they listen...?

It is absurd to think that my father, whom I never met, changed my life through his memoirs. Yet I still think this way. Last night, I burned all his memoirs in the fireplace. The neighbors reported me to the police, shouting, "This is the second stake you've driven into your son!" The police wanted to take my statement.

You won't believe it, but yesterday, I saw the scarred young man I had seen at the hotel in Turkey here in a park. He didn't recognize me. He was drunk and still trying to explain to a German sitting on a bench next to him how much he loved that girl.

Snow fell heavily here too.

Desperately, I called Anita. "I wish you and your stations happiness," she said. She knew me very well. How did she know that I had hung a large photo of the third station—the very station that twice darkened my life—on my wall...?

WE APPEAR IN THE CITY'S DREAMS

The Institute for Preserving Voices

The Engagement

Mr. Hilmi

The Wooden Horse

Winter Dreams

The Night Watches of Remembering

THE INSTITUTE FOR PRESERVING SOUNDS

In memory of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar

"Irfan is paralyzed..."

It was raining cats and dogs outside, and the first thing I heard from Oğuz when I entered his pharmacy in Çakırhamam was this sentence. Cars, city buses, and pedestrians had all surrendered to the rain, trying to move forward under the increasingly heavy downpour and the gridlocked traffic. As I took off my raincoat, I tried to figure out whether the Irfan Oğuz was talking about was the same person I had in mind.

I had received bad news about someone I had seen once or twice in the pharmacy but had never really heard speak, except for a single sentence as they left. It's not easy to tell their story based solely on what I heard from Oğuz. Still, I will attempt it, because I believe Irfan Değer, who passed away in 2010, was a remarkable individual, lived passionately, and had a life worth telling. I will do my best to convey him to you, someone no longer alive, to the extent of my ability.

A few years ago, on another rainy day, I remember someone hurriedly leaving the pharmacy and muttering in a soft, nondescript voice, "The city is grumbling." The man's tall frame, neatly pressed black trousers, and sparse, white-streaked, brylcreemed hair caught my attention. Oğuz explained that this man was Irfan Değer, an old classmate from the Boys' High School and an excellent tape recorder technician—so skilled, in fact, that even the Germans were impressed by his expertise. I never saw Irfan again, nor did I consider how a city could grumble. Had I met him, I might have foolishly claimed that his voice was hardly worth preserving.

You might understand with respect why someone with an ordinary life story would be drawn to such a remarkable life. Most of what I know about his life I learned from Oğuz after Irfan's death. In fact, Oğuz himself had not known much about Irfan until he passed; most details came from a yellow envelope Irfan left behind.

If you are someone interested in documenting how urban noise increases over time, and the concrete evidence of the sounds of machines and cars—what Irfan called "the noises of the

inanimate”—then you need to know Irfan Değer. What’s most remarkable is that Irfan did not limit himself to environmental noise; he cared about all sounds, beautiful or ugly. Through him, I realized that our immersion in the daily din of the city had made us forget that beautiful sounds once existed here. Irfan Değer, with extraordinary patience and dedication, preserved evidence of the city’s past beauty and of the relentless growth of urban noise.

Oğuz recalled one night at the pharmacy when Irfan excitedly described finding a lost recording. It was the sound of wind and rain near his mother’s grave at Pınarbaşı Cemetery from years ago. Half-jokingly, Oğuz suggested he also record the sounds of plants sprouting from the ground. Irfan responded, “You mean the sounds of plants growing, which our ears cannot hear. Perhaps they need to be recorded differently.”

Irfan lived a reclusive life, rarely interacting with authorities. After separating from his wife, he submitted a petition advocating for the creation of a “Sound Preservation Institute.” A few weeks later, a bureaucrat dismissed it as nonsense, telling him, “Go do something useful.”

At his friend Oğuz’s pharmacy, Irfan would complain, “Nothing is more useless than debating what is useful or useless in the world. They dig and fill holes to fight unemployment. We want to preserve the city’s sounds for future listeners, yet we get nothing but rejection. Who will remember the sound of Pınarbaşı water flowing from house to house?”

Irfan Değer was born in 1940 in a wooden house overlooking Pınarbaşı Cemetery, the son of a shoemaker. The midwife left after wishing the baby a good life, and the next day his grandfather whispered the call to prayer in his ear, giving him the name Irfan. His mother died of a heart attack when he was two, and he was raised by his grandmother. He grew up gazing at his mother’s grave, climbing onto pillows on a divan to choose a view.

Irfan was quiet and introverted. He loved wearing a huge hat in middle school, and his grandmother hung a photo of him wearing it on the wall of his room. His teachers remembered him as the child who asked endless questions about tape recorders. His fascination with sound continued during his military service in Ankara at the Communication School, where he studied devices to preserve sound.

After returning, he continued working at a radio repair shop and married his distant cousin Kevser in 1965. They eventually separated in 1975, partly due to her frustration with his obsession with the sounds of Pınarbaşı water and his meticulous habits. After his father’s death, Irfan retreated further into solitude, rarely leaving his home except to buy food or chat briefly with Oğuz.

In December 2009, Irfan handed Oğuz a large yellow envelope: “Keep this in your safe. If anything happens to me, you open it.” He passed away in August 2010. Only then did Oğuz realize how little he had truly known his friend—learning, for instance, that Irfan had been accused of espionage during his military service and faced anonymous letters from colleagues.

Irfan's dedication to preserving sound made him renowned locally and internationally, particularly for repairing Grundig TK series tape recorders. After his death, his collection of recordings—footsteps, children's voices, car engines, flowing water, band music, traffic, crying babies, rain, even neighborhood cats and dogs—was transferred to the City Museum. Each sound was cataloged by date and hour, creating a comprehensive archive of urban auditory history.

Long meetings were held under Ahmet Bey's leadership to discuss how these sounds could be used in the City Museum. Experts lectured on the relationship between cities and sound. Tea was served, simit was eaten. Someone explained that listening to the city's sounds was akin to learning its language. I thought back to Irfan's hushed voice at the pharmacy: *"The city is grumbling."*

Today, you can listen to Irfan Değer's preserved recordings in a section of the City Museum. Yet the main issue remains unresolved: how to systematically record the city's sounds. Oğuz recently admitted to a friend, "We cannot fulfill his will. That is our shame."

Sounds pile up ceaselessly over the city. Thousands of them—from the pine trees above Pınarbaşı Cemetery to street noises—wander freely, awaiting capture. Irfan Değer's vision for a Sound Preservation Institute has long been forgotten.

ENGAGEMENT

If you asked me to show you a garden in Bursa that has remained unchanged over time, without a second thought I would point to the Kükürtlü Garden. Its tall trees, greenery, flowers, the red fish swimming in the old-time pond covered with water lilies in the center, its silence, its sense of being forgotten, and its natural beauty—somehow that garden has always seemed to me like a person living in memories of the past. In my mind, it is a dream garden scented with spices, where hidden doors always open somewhere and saz melodies no one else can hear play.

Once, the color of the royal purple—worn only by Byzantine emperors—covered every corner like a cloak. Toward the end of April, the purple flowers boldly spread across the plain below Kükürtlü Garden and the hills above, defiantly recalling the nobility of the past. Around the garden, the soil stirred; poppies, daisies, grass, clovers, turtles, insects, and birds came alive with sun and rain. From the upper branches of the sleepy tall trees, hundreds of birds would take flight with a small breeze, and pollen would play with the sunlight.

In those days, in the mid-1960s, the plain was not yet fully encircled by squatter houses, and high-rise apartment buildings had not yet taken over the city. However, the workers on the night and day shifts of newly opened automobile factories were rapidly increasing the demand for squatter housing in the plain. The effects of the great bazaar fire still lingered among shopkeepers, and cafés were filled with complaints that business was not as it used to be. In 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in the United States; in Turkey, the death sentences of some soldiers who attempted a coup were approved by Parliament in February; and Istanbul saw the opening of its first Coca-Cola factory. A few days earlier, İsmet İnönü's removal from power had also become a topic among those following politics in Bursa. Interests and social circles had changed so much that no one even thought to stop and look at this garden as they passed by.

I also remember Kükürtlü Garden in my childhood when it became a summer music garden. Toward the end of the 1950s, there was a stage beneath the garden, and along the road stretching from Bursa to Çekirge, there were rows of makeshift boxes separated by trellises and ivy. I can still recall a dancer in tulle performing by the edge of the pond, and the violinist moving among the tables around it, in the register of my childhood eyes.

The noise and the smell of alcohol would mix with the sulfur from the Kükürtlü bath beneath that magical garden and spread across the plain on summer nights. In those days, there was also a small zoo in the garden with peacocks and gazelles that drew attention. The fact that those enjoying the garden were of a certain income level did not prevent the poor from bathing day or night in the natural open-air bath flowing down the slope. Perhaps in those days, rich and poor could mingle much more easily than today.

A month after the May 27 coup of 1960, Lawyer Hamdi Bey passed away. He was the child of a well-off family that had lived in Bursa for several generations. When asked, he would proudly say in a voice reminiscent of the Mehter band, “We’ve been here since the Ottomans.” If you listened to Hamdi Bey, a round-faced, well-fed man who loved good food, talk about his past, you would think he was a close friend of Ottoman sultans. The Republic was important to him because it was a continuation of the Ottoman Empire, and the War of Independence could never have been won without the glorious history of the Ottomans.

Despite his wishes, his only daughter Numude did not finish high school, could not become a lawyer as she wished, and dashed Hamdi Bey’s dreams of sharing a law office with her in his old age. When Hamdi Bey’s father named Numude years ago, he said, “In old Ottoman, ‘Numude’ means ‘betrothed.’” Hamdi Bey’s father, a former Sufi sheikh, had died when Numude was still very small, leaving his wife and son a few shops in the Grand Bazaar. At that time, he had withdrawn from the world, living in seclusion.

Although Hamdi Bey’s wife Nusret Hanım did not like the name Numude, she could not protest her father-in-law at the time, while inwardly thinking that the name Serpil would have suited her daughter better. Nusret Hanım did not like old-fashioned people, objects, or habits. From the beginning of their marriage, she had not gotten along well with her in-laws, but out of respect for her husband, she maintained cautious relations to avoid conflicts.

Nusret Hanım was the daughter of a Cretan family who had settled in Mudanya. Hamdi Bey met her when she came to his office regarding an inheritance matter and was immediately impressed. Visits to Mudanya began, and despite her parents’ objections, the marriage was arranged. While Hamdi Bey was less conservative than his parents in outlook, he was still quite traditional compared to a Cretan family girl. Since marriage is partly the art of sustaining compromise, Hamdi Bey and Nusret Hanım managed their marriage with small disagreements until Hamdi Bey died of a heart attack in his office.

After Hamdi Bey’s death, Nusret Hanım and their only daughter Numude continued to live in a single-story house in the garden atop Kükürtlü. You could describe Numude as “average” — neither too smart nor too dull, neither too beautiful nor too plain, neither thin nor overweight. She had once attended Akşam Girls’ Art School but dropped out.

At home, Numude loved the green bottle on her father’s desk that contained a model ship, unable to understand how it had been placed there. Dusting off her father’s black leather-bound books and arranging them as he had during his life became her task after his death.

The house was surrounded by trees like plum, olive, pine, quince, and pomegranate, obscuring it from view until one climbed the slope. Numude's childhood was spent in that garden, playing with the few nearby children on the steeper parts of the hill. Once, while newspapers reported a murderer with an axe in the city, they climbed the hill to search for him, saw a naked man with an axe in a distant olive grove, screamed down to their mothers, only to be disappointed to find he was just a gardener.

Among her childhood friends was the son of a Yugoslav immigrant gardener who occasionally came to prune the trees. Numude, strangely, liked this boy, five or six years older, and looked forward to the spring days when he and his father would come. Hüsmen had made a doll from wrapped branches for her, which she cherished more than the expensive dolls her father had brought from Istanbul, despite her mother's attempts to throw it away.

Nusret Hanım was a Westernized woman of her time, wearing hats, attending Republic Day balls with Hamdi Bey, dancing tango, waltz, and foxtrot. Her greatest dream was to live in Istanbul and shop in Beyoğlu. Although she often visited Istanbul while her husband was alive, it was never enough. Like other Istanbulites, she thought of Bursa as "just the provinces..." At one point, she even searched for a rental office in Beyoğlu for Hamdi Bey, insisting they move, but he refused, saying, "How can I leave my elderly mother alone in Bursa, Nusret?"

Her mother-in-law Şadiye Hanım, still alive, had never wanted her son to marry Nusret, but eventually consented. For years, she complained that Nusret had not raised Numude properly, claiming she spent too much time on the streets. In truth, Numude was quiet, unlike her mother, and capable of becoming an excellent homemaker. She loved sewing, embroidery, cooking, cleaning, and ironing. Her pastries and pies were admired by all of her mother's friends. Yet, despite her virtues, as she neared her late twenties, she had not yet found her match. Her mother's friends remarked, "A capable, handy girl, but her fate seems sealed. Nusret Hanım should find someone to open her destiny. Her name means 'betrothed,' but she hasn't been engaged yet."

Nusret Hanım was not the type to interfere in matters of fate. Years earlier, while pregnant with Numude, she had confronted a major during a dispute at a ball at Çelik Palas, taking his pistol from his hands to separate him from her husband. The commander remarked, "I tip my hat to your courage, madam."

One day, Ümmü Hanım, known as Arap Yenge in the family, came to Kükürtlü in great excitement. Whenever she arrived, Numude imagined desert caravans of gold being chased by bandits, likely inspired by the tales Arap Yenge told. That February morning, rain poured, floods swept the streets, and Arap Yenge explained the purpose of her visit without pause.

A distant relative by marriage, Arap Yenge was elderly. During the Ottoman era, when her husband Mahmut Dayı was captured by the British in Suez, she had been a nurse. She had helped him escape and, five years later, moved to Bursa to marry him. Everyone knew Arap Yenge and Mahmut Dayı as the heroes of a storybook romance.

Arap Yenge announced that Hikmet's family from Istanbul's Şişli wanted to propose to Numude. Nusret Hanım, secretly pleased, replied, "If it's fate, it will happen." But when no one came in the following days, Numude grew despondent, telling her mother, "It always happens this way, everyone likes me, but it ends in disaster." Her mother comforted her, "Perhaps the time hasn't come yet." But when would that time arrive? Her friends were probably thinking, "She stayed home." How she wished her father were alive; he loved her more than her mother and would have taken her to Istanbul to cheer her up.

In difficult times, Numude ran to her grandmother's house, seeking the shelter of her very elderly grandmother who had grown frail after Hamdi Bey's death. "My dear," she would say, asking if Numude had prayed for her father, reminding her she was the only one who could protect her from her mother, whom she called "the mad hat woman."

The name "Numude" was suggested to her father by her grandmother. Over time, this naming issue had widened the rift between Şadiye Hanım and Nusret Hanım. After Hamdi Bey's death, the two saw each other as little as possible. It was natural that Şadiye, always devout and conservative, could not get along with her daughter-in-law, who wore tulle hats.

Going back further, the discovery by Nusret Hanım of a talisman pinned to the living room curtains with a safety pin had been a major source of tension between her and her mother-in-law. Nusret accused her mother-in-law of doing it to disrupt her marriage, but Hamdi Bey insisted his mother could never have done such a thing.

Numude remembered well the nights her mother shouted, "Tell that spider-headed mother not to bother me!" while her father quietly said, "Don't shout, but Numude can hear you now." Her grandmother disliked modernly dressed people, hat-wearers, and those who went to balls and drank. She blamed her for "turning my son into a monkey," complaining everywhere. This talisman nearly turned husband and wife against each other, forcing Nusret to sleep in the living room until Hamdi Bey restored peace with a diamond necklace.

Just when Numude had lost all hope, in early April, Hikmet's family came with Arap Yenge to formally see her. Her future mother-in-law quietly indicated that she liked her. They lived in Şişli, Istanbul. Hikmet's father had died, and he lived with his mother, who spent most of her time helping her married daughters with their children. "My Hikmet is a true salon man," said the mother-in-law; not as flashy as her own mother, but well-dressed and head-covered. Arap Yenge continuously endorsed her words, urging a quick engagement.

A few days later, Hikmet came alone with a box of Turkish delight from Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir. Tall, slim, over thirty, confident, and well-dressed, he impressed both mother and daughter immediately. His crossed-leg posture and lighting a cigarette in a new home made an impression. Her mother said, "He will be a fine groom." When a friend asked Numude, "What does Hikmet do?" she could only say, "A lovely boy, though."

Events moved quickly. Numude and her mother traveled to Istanbul for engagement shopping. Her grandmother scolded her upon return, warning about the match and the daughter's fate. But Numude had already fallen for Hikmet, aware that she might otherwise end up unmarried.

It was the jacaranda season; the engagement took place in the covered section of Kükürtlü since the weather was still cool. The groom's side arrived in three or four private cars from Istanbul. They first had some food and drinks at home. A couple of her father's lawyer friends and some neighbors were invited. The women from Bursa scrutinized the dresses of the Istanbul women, finding them too revealing. The Istanbul women constantly looked down on the Bursalı, making "provincial darling" remarks.

With the jazz band playing Western tunes, the Istanbul women were exuberant, and the young girls danced the twist. The men from Bursa openly admired the dancing women. The Istanbul men and women also outdrank them. Rings were exchanged, toasts made, while grandmother Şadiye Hanım sat unnoticed. Afterwards, she hugged her granddaughter, wishing her happiness.

Years later, Numude met the son of the Yugoslav gardener from Bursa in a jewelry shop in Istanbul. He, too, had married and come to Istanbul, now middle-aged with graying hair. "I remember you," he said, "my father pruned your garden's trees." Numude felt a strange nostalgia, recalling her cloth dolls but saying nothing about her unhappy marriage: "I also came to Istanbul as a bride. We sold the house in Bursa a few months ago," she said, quickly leaving the shop.

It was late afternoon, still jacaranda season in Istanbul. If Numude went to the Hilton at that hour, she might have found Hikmet drinking with borrowed money from his sisters. After all, Numude, even by name, was an outdated provincial girl; Hikmet was a sophisticated salon man. Whether she had work or not didn't matter.

HİLMİ BEY

Hilmi Bey lived in a neighborhood that was neither in the center nor at the edge of the city; a place packed with 7-8 story crumbling apartment blocks where low-income families resided. The neighborhood was a known hopeless slice of a big city: its disheartening coffeehouse where every man—from tired retirees to unemployed youth—would end up, the struggling corner store, children fighting in the streets, and the newly arrived transvestites in the buildings. During derby matches, almost all sounds would cease; aside from a couple of women sharing trivial chatter from windows, only the roar of “Goal!” could be heard, and the entire neighborhood would transform into a stadium.

Hilmi was a middle-aged, dark-skinned, average-height man with greasy hair, a face ordinary enough to go unnoticed, and who had left school at middle school. When he retired from the slaughterhouse in his early fifties, his wife Bedriye said, “Now you’ll be wandering underfoot all day at home.” Hilmi no longer had a job. His soon-to-be-unemployed, high-school graduate, single son Selami teased him: “From now on, Mom goes to the neighbors, and we’ll guard the house together.” His married daughter Gülşen, while giving him the gray cardigan he had received upon retirement, said, “If you get bored, come to me, Dad, and play with the kids.”

Time had passed so quickly! He recalled his marriage, the deaths of his parents, the days his children went to school, his daughter’s wedding, and so on. From now on, he would follow news about pensions in the newspapers and on TV, take his blood pressure pills, and if his son-in-law also got them, he could even go for picnics on the hillside with a barbecue on Sundays. Hilmi’s habits seemed unlikely to change easily. He still woke up early as if going to work, tried to ease his boredom with a rosary in hand, secretly smoked without telling his wife, and would gaze blankly out the window when she scolded him, “You’ve smoked that stuff again and poisoned the room.”

Hilmi had attempted to find a new job a couple of times, but none of his efforts succeeded. Even trips to an internet café two streets away with his son yielded nothing. One evening, his wife, wiping her wet hands on her brown skirt in the kitchen, muttered, “Selami could have found you a job on the computer instead of himself...” She added that in that street, transvestites were scratching old men’s faces with broken beer bottles and that it was

dangerous to linger there. Hilmi's gloom deepened; every day he would end up at the neighborhood café, waiting for time to pass.

One evening, his daughter's father-in-law suggested selling kokoreç near the stadium on match days, noting that it was profitable, and that a neighbor had even bought a summer house from selling it. "You know how to cut and handle meat anyway," he said. "Maybe..." Hilmi replied, though his tone revealed he had no real interest. When the father-in-law left, Bedriye said, "That miserly rogue would fleece you—don't get involved with him," implying Hilmi was a bit naive.

The next morning, Hilmi woke up with a severe headache. They visited Sigorta Hospital, State Hospital, and even a private doctor at his son-in-law's insistence. Tests were run, brain scans taken, but no diagnosis could be made. The prescribed pills had no effect, and he soon stopped taking them. His wife blamed the one or two cigarettes he smoked daily for the headache, but Selami dismissed her, "Stop talking nonsense, Mom."

One morning, unable to bear it, Hilmi woke while everyone else was asleep, dressed without breakfast, and boarded a municipal bus to the old slaughterhouse. His friends were delighted to see him that early: "Wow Hilmi, retirement suits you..." they said. He stayed until noon, and surprisingly, while describing his persistent headache to friends, he noticed it had slightly eased.

That evening, when he told his wife about the relief, she said, "Then go every day to the slaughterhouse, work a little for free, and let people call us fools." The next morning, with a headache again, he reluctantly went back to the slaughterhouse, noting that the pain eased there.

Eventually, he told his doctor about this phenomenon. The doctor asked, "How many years did you work at the slaughterhouse, Hilmi Bey?" Thirty-two years. "Perhaps it's some kind of blood scent addiction..." the doctor suggested, recommending he spend time daily at his former workplace for a week.

Incredibly, Hilmi's headache improved at the slaughterhouse. Neighbors spread the story, embellishing it with words like "vampire" and "can't live without the smell of blood." Children said, "This man is like in the movies, he can't sleep without blood." Women added, "If he can't find blood, he might even kill his wife." The rumors left Hilmi isolated at the café. His son Selami, unconvinced, fought a friend spreading nonsense about his father and ended up at the police station, which made Hilmi grasp the situation's absurdity.

The real blow came a few days later. After dinner, his wife expressed fear over the "blood scent thing" and insisted she wanted to stay at their daughter's, helping with the grandchildren. She said, "Selami has no intention to work or marry. Let him manage his life, you take care of yourself." Hilmi knew she wasn't actually afraid of him; she was using the blood excuse to get him out of the house.

Now left alone, Hilmi's solitude compounded his "blood scent addiction." Neighbors and relatives scrutinized him about whether his family was disturbed by this alleged condition. Another doctor told him no such addiction existed and that other reasons for his headaches must be investigated. Retirement had clearly not suited him; Hilmi began yearning for his old days and his family, never quite understanding where things had gone wrong.

When he saw a distant relative, Rüstem—who had called him a vampire at the café—his headache worsened. Rüstem had once sought Bedriye's hand, but her father refused, deeming him unemployed. Hilmi had never liked him. Rüstem appeared at his table, grinning: "Finally, you're alone again..." he mocked.

After falling from his chair and hitting his head, no one in the café realized his blood pressure had spiked and his right side had been paralyzed. When Hilmi opened his eyes at the hospital, he saw his wife and a nurse giving him IV fluids. He could hear but not speak. Bedriye fretted about the "blood scent addiction," even linking the doctors' talk of a "brain hemorrhage" to it. At that moment, Hilmi seriously entertained the idea of being a vampire: "I wish I were a vampire," he thought, closing his eyes to avoid seeing his wife.

THE WOODEN HORSE

It was as if that house marked the place where words ended and silence began. With its narrow facade that revealed little of what lay behind, it looked out onto the street like a frail, melancholy old person. At the end of the dead-end alley, you would see an old, spiderweb-covered door and, above it on the upper floor, a single window aligned with the door, flanked on either side by two patchy blue walls—nothing more.

Not just the house, but even the enormous rusty door knocker had gone unused for years, except in children's make-believe games. Years ago, a jeweler from Istanbul had bought the house. He and his wife had visited it once, then neither sold it, rented it, nor used it.

The gray and black hues reminiscent of World War II still dominated the alley. A large branch of the plane tree would sometimes break off in the southwest wind and block the alley's entrance. Apart from a few incidents—such as the same alley hosting a café doubling as a party office, drummers playing on Republic Day, or the murder of an elderly woman living in the dead-end—there were no significant events in its history.

On some days, the notes of the “Expected Song” floated from a gramophone in the café, but even that could not dispel the gloom of the alley. Somehow, people seemed to be waiting not for the song, but for another potential conflict. They could not forget the tea they drank with raisins, and though İsmet Paşa might have protected them from war, they no longer felt much sympathy for his party.

If the noise from a fight between a couple of taverns and their red-nosed patrons across the street didn't carry into the alley, the dead-end remained nearly silent. Only the voices of a few children, the cries of gypsies selling leeches, and women shaking rugs from their windows broke the quiet. Even the faint scent of honeysuckle seeping into the alley in early autumn went unnoticed. Residents mostly complained about dampness and rheumatism.

The narrow, quiet house, long unnoticed by the alley's residents, had been inherited by Seniye Hanım after the Istanbul jeweler's wife died. When she arrived with her belongings, the house instantly became the center of the alley's attention. As the furniture was unloaded—a mahogany table, mother-of-pearl inlaid side tables, a wooden toy horse, and nightstands that

clearly came from Istanbul—the neighbors were captivated. If the woman was wealthy, why move to this dead-end alley?

Seniye Hanım descended from the truck, gathered the hems of her coat, inserted a huge key into the lock, and opened the narrow, quiet house's door with the ease of someone who had lived there for forty years.

Many had moved to Istanbul, but the alley's residents had never before seen someone coming from Istanbul. Seniye Hanım, in her late fifties, walked upright unlike the women of the alley and was beautiful. Her face suggested she had lived in fine places and had experienced much in life.

On the first day, a woman living next to the narrow house noticed Seniye Hanım's massive brooch on her dark green dress and her earrings as she opened her coat to enter the house, and she could not stop telling the neighbors about it.

Now, there were two Seniyes in the alley: the Istanbul Seniye and Our Seniye. Over time, the residents, growing accustomed to Seniye Hanım, gradually abandoned questions about why she had moved there, inventing half-serious, barbed explanations like, "The air in Istanbul didn't suit her" or "She saw it in a dream one night and came."

Yet the generous aid Seniye Hanım gave to a few people in need immediately changed the atmosphere and helped the narrow community accept her. Women began praising her: "Such a refined woman, clearly raised with manners... and what a beautiful brooch she has..."

It seemed that the hardships following her husband's death, coupled with her married son living far away in Anatolia and paying little attention to her, drove her to leave Istanbul. Curiously, this spread quickly through the alley, and soon someone even expressed interest in marrying Seniye Hanım.

The intermediary was Our Seniye, who lived in the alley. She had conveyed a firm refusal to the suitor and to the other women in the alley.

Two years after the move, a postal mishap caused confusion. The elderly, absent-minded postman Rıza accidentally delivered a letter meant for Istanbul Seniye to Our Seniye. Illiterate, she had her middle-school-aged grandchildren read it. The letter said:

"Immoral woman, the murderer of my father, I cannot even call you mother. Shamelessly, you still live in the house of my murdered father. Running won't save you—you know this as well as you know the bread you eat. By chance, I found your address. Life isn't always against the good..."

I share a cell with a driver who recently entered the same prison. He had moved a woman's belongings from Istanbul and, upon returning home, caught his friend with another man and stabbed him. He told me more about the items he moved, especially the wooden horse. Apparently, he loved playing with a wooden horse as a child. I also wrote to a friend in the city you fled, describing my father's house as best I could. Your location was revealed.

So shamelessly, you still sit in the house of that innocent man, my dear father... If your friend from Hereke, whom I couldn't kill, had protected you... My father died of shame, my home fell apart, I rot in prison, and you live without regret. Mark my word, woman: the moment I get out, my first task will be to find you and settle the score.

Signed: Your father's enemy, the son."

The letter explained everything. The alley was thrown into turmoil, then, as if it had never been opened, the postman sent it to Istanbul Seniye.

Everything was now reversed. Those who had praised her as a "refined woman" began claiming they never liked her. Even if no one had seen her jeweler husband, the Hereke friend, or the son who stabbed him, everyone recounted the story with ever more detail, embellishing it with each retelling.

According to some, she had been an insatiable silk carpet enthusiast and had met the Hereke man while buying rugs. Others claimed he was her youthful love and that she could never forget him despite marrying the jeweler. Some even speculated that the child threatening her now was actually from the Hereke man. Meanwhile, some women noted the wooden horse in the house. Others asked why she would move to her ex-husband's house in another city if she wanted to escape.

Everyone's minds were confused. Some even claimed she was a German spy. Amid this chaos, one late afternoon, Seniye Hanım packed her belongings with a well-dressed man nearing seventy and moved away again, giving the wooden horse to one of the children watching.

The women of the alley, watching the move from behind muslin curtains, inspected the wooden horse once the belongings were gone. They believed the secret lay within the horse, thinking the Hereke rug-seller had sent it as a charm. Whether true or not, the women, out of spite, smashed the wooden horse and threw it away. One could never trust women like that.

Afterward, the narrow, quiet house once again assumed its abandoned, strange identity. "Where words ended and silence began," we said—but we were wrong. The alley's residents never stopped inventing stories about Istanbul Seniye.

Among the rumors were:

- The last old man who came was actually from Hereke...
- The son had been released from prison but could not find his mother...
- The woman returned to Istanbul and married a very wealthy man; when her son got out, the rich man reconciled them and took the boy to work...
- The son came out of prison and killed his mother in a small Anatolian town. Newspapers wrote about it, though no one knew who read it...

One day, a young man asked the café patrons at the end of the alley whether they had seen a woman with a huge brooch on her chest, and when asked about his identity, he merely replied, "I'm an unlucky one," and left.

Meanwhile, the southwest wind broke another branch of the plane tree that autumn. Later, during Republic Day celebrations, as drums and zurna played in front of the café, a fire broke out in the narrow wooden house at the end of the alley. Everyone watched in panic as the fire brigade struggled to extinguish it.

The next day, Seniye, a local, claimed she found a wet letter in the ruins. Few believed her since they hadn't seen it, but according to Our Seniye's account, the poor Istanbul woman had been falsely accused. She was innocent... The wooden horse, it turned out, had been kept with her because of her longing for her son.

Now, at the end of the alley, the old house with the single window and two patches of blue paint on either side stood in ruins. Even the narrow facade that might have hinted at what went on inside was gone.

Yet the alley's residents still told stories in their free time about the branches torn off by the southwest wind, the elderly woman killed during Republic Day, and the life of the mysterious Istanbul Seniye. Then, with a sense of pride, they would add: "Don't underestimate this dead-end alley..."

WINTER DREAMS

Dear Bursa...

How are you? Are you well?

I don't know if you know, as the old saying goes, that sadness is really just another name for time.

And when I think of time, I am always haunted by those old, delicate, lute-like sorrows.

What can I say? Everything changes so much...

It's been quite a while since the new year began, yet we are still waiting for winter. The great mountain we lean against, with all its life, soil, and rocks, waits for winter too, and we dream our winter dreams, however strange it may be.

We dream of blankets woven from the white snowflakes falling from the sky, of smoking stoves long forgotten, of silence itself. As for me, I'm not well—ever since my wife died, the ringing in my ears has never stopped.

No matter how we turned the seasons upside down, winter simply hasn't come this year. Not even rain, let alone snow. I've recited countless prayers for snow to fall. You wouldn't believe it, but when it starts, I will weep quietly inside. Dreaming of winter has always been a refuge for me. I am actually afraid of summer.

We started with small talk. I had wanted to write you an old-fashioned letter for a long time; today seems to be the day. The other day, if I hadn't seen our Hamza Bey, I would have fallen back into my daily routines and forgotten you, my dear. You know, the ones who used to sit behind the shops. His father was a court clerk, you remember? He had aged considerably, talking to himself. I cannot say he looked well. Our fathers were friends while they were healthy. When we went to school, they got us matching school bags. Food and drink were always shared. His mother, wearing a white scarf on her head, made liver wraps so delicious you could eat her fingers. Later, when they became somewhat wealthy, everyone said they got conceited. Did they find treasure or what...

No one opens old notebooks like Hamza Bey. He still hasn't quit smoking, puffing away like a chimney at his age, cursing the doctors without shame. He told me again, from afar, about his

unfortunate relative Muradiye. As he spoke, I remembered how I always beat him in backgammon using strategy.

His dress was neat. A scarf around his neck, the worn handle of an old black bag he had carried for years brushing the ground. His hearing seemed a bit worse. I told my mother when I got home. She didn't remember him at all. The kids had bought her headphones, but she couldn't use them because of the buzzing. "What a waste of money," she said. He was carrying a plastic bag from the market. Somehow, the conversation always circled back to Muradiye. Apparently, her late husband owed her money...

Starting with the price of tomatoes at the market, he listed celery, cabbage, oranges, tangerines. He ate broccoli because it was healthy. He asked if I noticed how tired people were. After resisting for so many years, he finally got a cell phone—well, the kids forced him to get one. Old arguments never end. It all saddens me. That's why I said at the start of my letter, "sadness is really the name of time." In this fleeting world, what can we share...

I saw Hamza Bey very thin, his cheeks sunken. His children don't pay attention. "They made me get a cell phone. Every other moment, 'Take care of yourself,' they say. How can I take care of myself at this age? Probably, when I die, I'll open my cell phone and say, 'I'm sorry, I couldn't take care of myself. Farewell,' to them..."

He complained that his eyes could no longer read the numbers in his phone. He told me how we got stuck descending the mountain one winter. His memory isn't that bad. He named all his grandchildren's car brands and said, "Stick with Nokia for your cell phone." Apparently, the grandchildren roam around in SUVs, going to Şehreküstü, or somewhere like that...

Dear Bursa...

Talking about cell phones, Hamza Bey brought the topic back to Muradiye. You know better—he must have wanted to marry her once, but Muradiye refused. "I caught the charm of her green eyes," he had said many times back then. When her husband died owing her money, the post office incident happened—Hamza Bey mentioned it in passing. Muradiye, understandably angry, had replied, "We'll pay you with your money, and may you be buried with it!" How ugly all that was...

The woman really was unlucky. My dear. She was also my distant relative. That girl never smiled. Her husband's business faltered while he was alive. After he died, her eldest daughter divorced and moved in with Muradiye with two children. Her son ruined his business. No matter what anyone says, she is unfortunate. Yet she is very beautiful. "The beautiful have no luck," my late wife used to say—what can you say to that truth. Hamza Bey had told me of his fondness for Muradiye even while his wife was alive.

You'll remember Hamza Bey's daughter, Servet—she married the son of the Çekirge jeweler. Their photos appeared in the newspapers at society events. At the wedding, my father caused a scene again. I knew the girl as a child; she was very quiet. Now she is very sick. Her husband

took her to America. Not a single doctor was left to visit. One grandchild is studying in America, “learning to make cartoons for TV,” they say. Ah, that Hamza Bey...

I’m starting to forget names. You know, Muradiye’s aunt’s daughter... her face comes to mind, but I can’t recall her name. I think it was Alev. They moved into our apartment. I don’t remember her husband’s name, but their surname is Altıparmak. They became quite wealthy. While moving, it took two full weeks to transfer all their belongings. Modern plasma TVs and such. I don’t understand how they fit it all in. The son is a computer guy, drinks a bit too much, apparently. Neighbors in the next apartment said—they heard it from me—that they fought every night. The girl insisted on moving to Bademli, where the villas are. Hamza Bey would just say, “Their family is uncultured,” and leave it at that.

The streets at dusk are a flood of cars. Everyone complains about lack of money, yet everyone owns a car. How does that work? Wallets full of plastic cards, filling plastic bags. Society has a sense of having escaped the ropes. We are old, so we speak little. I can only unload my heart in letters. Otherwise, people would say I envy the youth. Just recently, Alev’s father-in-law died. He was a contractor; left fifty apartments to his son. I told Hamza Bey, and he said, “We worked like fools; all of these people are lucky.” Muradiye’s type loses her husband in debt; others inherit fifty apartments. Fate gives some baklava and pies, others shovels and picks.

This man is a bit foolish...

Apparently, late at night we sneak out into the streets with my mother...

“Get treatment,” he told me.

Senile, completely senile!

After my wife died, he always lies about how alone my mother and I were, about how my mother liked to throw stones off the bridge at night. “You always say ‘such and such,’” he told me, criticizing my phrasing.

If I told him how the city dreams at night, he’d call me mad...

Suddenly, I am changing...

As if anything ever stays the same.

Look, even the winter I love has not come this year. In my dreams, I see snow falling. A white-bearded man roams the streets, shouting, “Purify yourselves, purify yourselves; your sins are covered—the snow is here!” I await the white blanket that will cover the plains and the mountains with a deeper longing than ever. Yet he, disregarding his age, presses a button on his phone and plays one of the day’s popular songs. This man will never learn...

I should have said to him: In the city’s dreams, he sees us. In our worst, most pitiful states, in the most grotesque disguises, we occupy his dreams, wandering the alleyways of his memory. While you sleep wrapped in your quilt, we are in charge of the city’s dreams. When snow falls, my mother throws stones from the bridge. My shrunken, old, wrinkled, almost living-corpse-like mother and I gallop through the city’s dreams. While catching our breath, we hum a tune, “Cross the bridge, come on...”

Silly Hamza Bey—what’s the big deal? None of this is real...
My brother is already going court to lock both of us in an asylum...

Dear Bursa...

How could I explain that these are your dreams... Even if some of them mix with my winter dreams, they are all still dreams. Our lives have passed amid all sorts of trivialities. If we had a child, perhaps things would be different. Sometimes my brother lies, claiming my mother threw her gold off the bridge. How could that poor old woman even have gold...

I know that, even if it comes late this year, winter will eventually arrive. When the snow falls, you will see the most incredible of dreams that night. To you, to the plain, to the slopes of Uludağ, a terrifying silence will descend. Breathless, we will all pause and listen to it.

Hamza Bey, Muradiye, Servet, Alev...

I, too—so many people, so many dreams, so much pain, so many broken hearts...

Changing neighborhoods, aging people, and their winter dreams will rest quietly under the snow for a short while. Then, when the southwest wind blows and the snow melts, the grand illusion will crumble like a fragile glass palace. For me, the sidewalks and streets after the snow melts will again be filled with nightmares. Then we will helplessly begin to wait for the next winter.

The streets overflow with cars. This winter is unusually warm. Seasons have changed: warm winters, cold summers are stuck in my head. The words “global warming” freeze my blood. And yes, it will happen. Streets grow busier each day. One must be careful; the weather can shift suddenly. Temperature swings make people ill. I told my brother, “What do you care about the gold? My father saved it; my mother gives it away—what’s it to you? They say I change my name and call it Şehreküstü...” Let him sue, let him sue...

My father always caused fights at weddings. He would wear a suit and tie, but if we weren’t called for photos, he would drunkenly yell and rush at relatives. My mother would tell him, “You’re drunk, sir,” and he would take his share. At the end of the wedding, he would undo his tie, swing it, and attack people. Before every wedding, my mother would feign illness, but my father would drag us anyway. When they came to fetch the bride, he would lie in front of the car, in the mud. That’s why my mother would whisper, “His father beat this fool so much.” Who knows what my father dreamed in the winters...

Dear Bursa...

All of this is written in your dreams. They are dreams; none of it is real... If it were real, how could anyone endure this much pain... Only when snow falls, the whiteness descending from the sky envelops everything, and the pains seem to freeze. A kind of numbness, you see. That moment brings a small relief so you can see your most beautiful dreams. A brief, very brief

moment. That's all. Then the dreams fade like a song whose sound diminishes. Then our minds get stuck in the southwest wind, and back in the mud and noise.

I first learned my wife was a kleptomaniac from my mother, on a day when the snow melted. "Your snow is a thief. Don't try to defend it to me!" she shouted. After my father died of cirrhosis, my mother changed drastically. That quiet woman, who always feared my father's outbursts, began speaking loudly, and once left a substantial inheritance, scolded her relatives constantly, including my wife. Relatives thought she took out her husband's misdeeds on the daughter-in-law and said among themselves, "Poor bride, poor girl."

I liked Muradiye back then, too. My father's aggression had spoiled it, and I didn't leave the house for days. My late wife knew this well. Hamza Bey talking in the middle of the street about Muradiye's husband owing her money was because of this. One of our relatives had just learned about it.

"I wish you had married her," he told me.

Fool...

So many years have passed...

We've all aged...

Look at what's spoken in the middle of the street. Then he asked, "How's your mother? Is she ninety-eight yet?" Afterwards, he began crying in the middle of the street for his daughter Servet. Servet's youngest daughter is wanted by textile people. "They're owners of a holding; they're very rich," he says. Fool, as if it will affect her. Sit and worry about your daughter; let people marry whoever they will.

Dear Bursa...

Just as I was about to say, "Have a good day" to Hamza Bey and leave, I looked into his eyes and shouted inside:

Aren't you ashamed to remind me of Muradiye...

Don't you know sadness is really the name of time...

The fool looked at me blankly. I don't think he understood why I looked at him that way. Don't I know that he told everyone he drove my wife mad with my mother...

I must go home immediately and dream winter dreams.

Then I will tell them to my mother at length...

She loves the ones with glass palaces.

Dear Bursa...

The heart of my winter dreams...

Please write to me, tell me what's happened.

With endless sadness...

Yours, Şehreküstü³.

THE NIGHT WATCHES OF REMEMBERING

Forget everything, mother, forget everything. Wipe my face, my eyes, from your mind, slowly approaching the loneliness of a small town. Let your gaze float aimlessly in the void when you wake in the morning. Forget the picnics we had under the quince trees at the edge of the clover field, the springs, the oak trees washed by rain, the delicious meals you made, the floods in the basement of our single-story house in winter, the spells you cast to keep your husband, the countless colorful meteors that whizzed above us during a neighbor's circumcision party—forget all our memories, mother, forget everything. Don't ask me questions like, "Has the meteor gotten Alzheimer's?"

I have no intention of claiming all the memories we shared. They are yours too; half are yours. But as you forget your share, it's as if something in me is quietly erased too.

Forget everything, but do not forget your son, mother... Forget that my father cheated on you, but never forget me—the me you inscribed in the night watches of remembering.

Also, write down somewhere that, knowingly or unknowingly, you tried to make a killer out of me, mother. Whether you want to forget or remember, the foolish games of elders echo in the pure minds of children. Which of us is innocent with all the memories we've ripped from each other, patched onto each other?

We have a long road ahead, here or beyond. Believe me, every morning I struggle for hours to explain who I am to you. Around noon, when I start to see a faint flicker in your eyes, I resist again—shouting, "Forget everything, mother, forget everything, but don't forget me!"—and riding the seas of silence above us with tiny hopes, I still resist.

Why didn't you secure your memories, mother? Why are they unraveling... If you loved my father so much, what does that have to do with me? Yet, knowingly or unknowingly, why did you push me toward such lovelessness toward him, mother...

On the steps of a foreign train station, the little girl I met and the distant man holding her hand—surely, there had to be a price to pay. As the trains passed with clamor, I didn't want to see the live proof of what my father had done, mother...

³ Şehrekustu (literally "the edge of the city," a historic district in Bursa, Turkey. Also means "a man turned his back on this city.")

I am his son, not your husband. Look at my face with some understanding. If you will leave me alone in my memories and forget everything again, don't incite me against him. Think a little—years later, when you reconcile with your husband, imagine what distant places in my mind you will have stirred.

Before forgetting everything, when you looked at me and said, "But he is your father..." I had already begun to learn that this world was loaded with forgettings and being forgotten. Still, the collapse was immense. Forgetting, being forgotten, pretending to forget, constantly working to make others forget—we were drowning at every step in this world full of forgetfulness.

Now, I think you are truly forgetting everything. Etching everything into my brain only for you to forget—isn't that a little mischievous, mother... Or should I call it treachery, if it's not rude...

I quit my work.

I left my wife.

Every morning I start again with you, like the man in mythology who pushes the rock up the hill, knowing it will tumble down again every time...

No matter how much I remind you of me, I know you will forget me, mother. I am the one pushing the rock; you are the one rolling it back down, mother.

Why did you drag me into your affairs, mother? I wish I had kept the long letters you wrote telling me what my father did; maybe they would have helped you remember. Would the medicine in the glass and the incessant rain, I wonder, help you recall passing through Elmasbahçeler...

My father betrayed you, and you betrayed me, mother. I didn't read those long letters at the time, knowing you would dismiss them with, "But he is your father, my dear..."

Even more painfully, just before forgetting everything, how could your tongue and mind say, "We never hurt each other, never spoke an unkind word to each other," mother... Yet there was no need for you to forget what happened. I wish I could forget some of it too, so the pain would ease.

Look at my face, mother, and never forget that I left my wife and my work to remind you of what belongs to you. Don't forget your poor son, 24 years old, who went to the battlefield to protect you. Don't let anyone shamelessly say, "You're exaggerating, your father wasn't that bad..."

My wife shouts at me, "You fool!" Perhaps she's right, but when you forget all this, how could she understand how I account for all those years filled with pain... Besides, I am not a policeman, mother; I have no intention of taking you anywhere. Don't just stare blankly and call your husband—he's long dead. He has taken his sins and merits with him. We are left, just the two of us, in a city that grows more tangled as we age. Sirens, murmurs, crowds, and

loneliness surround us. Just the two of us, and you begin forgetting everything. As your mind grows desolate, the pain inside me grows even more.

You even forgot the giant meteor that passed over us: the peach trees, the lace you embroidered, the clothes you sewed, your betrayal... But above all, how could you forget that because you loved your husband so much, you set me against him like a dog, mother...

To whom should I open my heart now, to whom should I tell my troubles, to whom should I dedicate the first pages of a long book of forgettings...

A small chance, but will the sky clear and turn blue in my heart then... Or will a giant meteor pass again over us, scattering its colors, knowing we will forget with the murmurs...

Why did you inscribe me in the night watches of remembering, mother...